

Salafist- jihadism

IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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The threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia remains high, but, as is the case in Australia, it's neither an existential threat nor even one of the more significant ones facing most people in the region. It is, however, resilient.

Even in southern Thailand and the southern Philippines—the regions most severely affected by terrorism in Southeast Asia—terrorist violence remains but one threat among other forms of violent crime and doesn't begin to approach the level of threat found in conflict-ridden parts of the Middle East and Africa.

While the long-running, largely low-level, insurgencies of the southern Philippines and the deep south of Thailand fuel a steady stream of violence, *jihadi* networks and small groups inspired, directly or indirectly, by Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda are the greatest immediate threat, particularly in Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. The precipitating drivers remain local grievances, but individuals and groups tend to become more brazen and less inhibited in using extreme violence when they see themselves as being part of a cosmic struggle and their actions being praised and validated by a global insurgent movement.

The Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) attacks in Bali on 12 October 2002 were a direct result of Indonesian, Malaysian and Filipino fighters travelling to join the conflict in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Those 'Afghani alumni' formed the leadership and core of JI. While most were persuaded that post-Suharto Indonesia was neither the time nor the place for violent jihad, an idealistic and impatient minority disagreed and took it upon themselves to orchestrate a series of suicide attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) throughout the 2000s.

Many attacks in recent years have been inspired by the rise of IS in Syria and Iraq. Some have involved returnees from the fighting in the Middle East, but most have involved people who were unable to travel but were inspired to act in the name of IS at home. Since the devastating defeat of its insurgency in Poso, Central Sulawesi, in 2007, the JI network, in seeking to quietly and carefully rebuild, has avoided provocative violence.

At the same time most, if not all, Patani Malay insurgents from Thailand's deep south and many Moro insurgents in the southern Philippines continue to be driven by local grievances framed in ethnonationalist terms, unlike violent Islamist extremists in peninsular Malaysia and in Indonesia.

The defeat of the IS caliphate project in Syria and Iraq and the interrupted flow of foreign fighters and supporters have brought some respite but by no means the cessation of the threat. The lessons of the Afghanistan conflict and the rise of al-Qaeda in the 1980s are that a relatively small number of foreign fighters travelling to a conflict zone can have a disproportionate influence and that the impact at home might be felt only many years later.

The longer historical experience of Indonesia, and to some extent the Philippines and Malaysia, is that violent extremism is highly social and is prone to being intergenerational. JI in Indonesia arose out of the Darul Islam movement that began in the 1950s and was injected with fresh life in the 1970s and 1980s, partly because of political oppression and a crackdown on militants. JI was inspired by the experience of fighting in Afghanistan in association with al-Qaeda and, while it broke with Darul Islam in 1993, the family and social connections woven through its fabric have their origins in decades of conflict, local grievance, increasing radicalisation and the rise of transnational terrorist networks.

What this means is that neither the end of the IS caliphate nor the arrest and sentencing of thousands of militants and supporters will end the threat or dissipate the social movements involved.

INDONESIA

The tactical response to violent extremism in Indonesia is led by Detachment 88, the specialist Indonesian Police counterterrorism unit better known locally as Densus (a contraction of *Detasemen Khusus*, Special Detachment). The larger strategic response is coordinated by BNPT (*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme*, the National Agency for Combating Terrorism).¹ Without relentless intelligence work behind the scenes, and a regular stream of arrests, the threat of terrorism would quickly worsen. And yet policing, prosecution and detention by themselves are unable to eliminate or even greatly diminish the resilient threat posed by violent extremist networks. Real advances will begin to be made only when the cycle of recruitment and radicalisation is interrupted by disengagement from malign networks, individual and collective rehabilitation and the effective re-engagement of former militants with mainstream society. Fortunately, the implications of this challenging dynamic are now widely recognised by experienced counterterrorism leaders in Indonesia, and most of the key actors, including within the government, acknowledge the necessity of a broader approach to preventing and countering violent extremism.

While the present problem largely manifests through individuals and networks linked to IS, many long-term observers, such as Sidney Jones and her colleagues at the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), warn that JI, which continues to be inspired by al-Qaeda, is a persistent and powerful radical presence and potentially a longer term danger. Their reasoning, as is unpacked below, is that JI remains a significant future threat precisely because it's a well-disciplined, deeply radical, intergenerational network patiently playing the long game.²

Around 800 Indonesians travelled to Syria and Iraq to support the IS caliphate project. Another 400 or so arrived in Turkey *en route* to Syria before being turned back by Turkish authorities. In late 2019, in the wake of the final defeat of the caliphate, around three dozen alleged IS fighters were detained in Syria along with a much larger number of family members—somewhere around 700—separately detained in Syrian displaced persons camps.³

Most of the successful and attempted terrorist attacks in Indonesia in recent years have been carried out in the name of IS and have been linked to the peak IS network, Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD). Some have involved returnees, but most were launched by people who had never travelled to the Middle East. Detachment 88 intelligence work has become so effective that larger cells and more ambitious attack plans seldom proceed to fruition without interruption. Consequently, most of the attacks involve either secretive, close-knit cells, such as the three families involved in the Surabaya attacks in May 2018, or lone actors working autonomously and often spontaneously, such as the married couple who attacked General Wiranto with crude knives as he stepped out of his car on a visit to Bantul, west of Jakarta, in October 2019.⁴

The targets of such IS lone-actor attacks have been, for the most part, police or other security personnel. Even when the attacker acts alone, however, there will invariably be social networks of influence and support behind them, at the very least in their online relations. In Indonesia, that network is generally more immediate. And, if the attack involves obtaining a gun or deploying an IED, there's almost always a support group off-stage. Such was the case with the lone suicide bomb attack on police headquarters in Medan, North Sumatra, on 13 November 2019. Within four days of the attack, police arrested 43 suspected JAD militants—20 in North Sumatra and neighbouring Aceh, 22 in Java and 1 in Kalimantan. A further two people thought to be the bombmakers died in a police raid.⁵

Detachment 88 has become enormously effective in detecting and disrupting terrorist plots. Its work has led to the arrest of more than 1,400 suspected terrorists since the formation of the specialist counterterrorism police unit 15 years ago. Around 808 were arrested between 2015 and 2018, and 376 arrests were made in 2018 alone.⁶ A further 24 alleged militants were killed in counterterrorism operations in 2018. The vast majority of those arrested were successfully prosecuted and sentenced.

This success, however, has generated its own problems. Indonesia has a relatively large prison population of more than 250,000 detainees in almost 500 prisons. That population is roughly twice the design capacity of the prisons holding it, resulting in a prisoner to prison guard ratio of around 55 to 1.⁷

Historically, terrorism prisoners have been scattered throughout the Indonesian archipelago, but more recently there's been a focus on concentrating them in specialist facilities. By October 2018, the Directorate General of Corrections, working with experts in Detachment 88, had placed 252 IS-inspired terrorism detainees in three maximum security prisons. The longer term plan is for most terrorism detainees to be kept in a new, specially constructed, prison on the prison island of Nusa Kambangan, near Cilicap, off the south coast of Central Java.

These changes come about because of growing concerns about terrorism detainees radicalising other prisoners and being free to operate as leaders and recruiters from within their prison cells, exploiting lax visiting rules and using smuggled mobile phones and computers.

Indonesia lacks an extensive and suitably resourced parole program, and in-prison rehabilitation programs for terrorist detainees have until recently been limited to small pilot projects initiated by civil society organisations. BNPT has only recently initiated a 'deradicalisation' program for around 500 terrorism detainees in a specialist facility in Sentul, Bogor, West Java. BNPT has also initiated a series of rehabilitation programs for women and children sent back from Turkey.⁸

These initiatives represent the most significant engagement with rehabilitation programs so far in Indonesian. Like similar programs elsewhere, however, they struggle with problems in assessing risk and progress in rehabilitation and have experienced some significant failures together with some promising signs of individuals disengaging from violent extremist networks.

The greatest danger facing Indonesia at the moment is from radicalised individuals in networks inspired by IS, whether linked to JAD or operating separately. The vast majority of the larger, more sophisticated and ambitious terrorism plots are likely to continue to be foiled by Detachment 88 due to the work of some of the best and most experienced police counterterrorism intelligence teams in the world, but lone actors remain a perennial threat. But, as noted above, JI remains a significant

concern not least because it has a large, disciplined, well-organised network of more than 2,000 activists. This means that the JI network is as large today as it's ever been and has now recovered from its decimation in 2007, when its campaign of armed clashes with police in Poso, Central Sulawesi, led to a crushing counterinsurgency campaign assisted by the Indonesian military and to the death or capture of its senior leadership.

By publicly disavowing violence and focusing on *dakwah* (proselytising) as a peaceful pathway to eventually establishing an Islamic state, JI has broadened its base of support and carved out a public space for open campaigning. Leaders such as Abu Rusdan, who was sentenced to three and half years in jail in the mid-2000s for his activities with JI, appear regularly on television and campaign on university campuses and in madrasahs, mosques and public venues in the name of outreach organisations such as Majelis Dakwah Umat Islam.⁹ IPAC has documented JI's efforts to recruit strategically important graduates and professionals.¹⁰

One of the reasons that JI continues to be considered a potential security threat is that it appears to be playing a double game. While publicly disavowing violence, it has ongoing links with weapons procurement and paramilitary training. Sometimes referred to as 'Neo-JI', the network that reinvented itself over the past decade has established Asyikari military wings across Java and in southern Sumatra.¹¹

In June 2019, Para Wijayanto, a JI sniper and bombmaker trained in Mindanao and Poso, who had been on the run since 2003 and who was thought to have been acting since 2008 as JI's true emir, or leader, was arrested in Bekasi on the eastern edge of greater Jakarta. Para had been responsible for sending dozens of JI recruits to train with al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria in six waves between 2013 and 2018, as part of a 'grand strategy' of quietly building a skilled and disciplined paramilitary force even while advocating against the immediate use of violence within Indonesia. Police arrested 14 returnees in May 2019, and those arrests led to Para being tracked down. A total of 34 suspected JI militants were arrested in May and June 2019. At the same time, it was discovered that JI had interests in palm oil plantations that generated a substantial revenue stream to finance its operations.¹²

JI has been running a highly disciplined network, both above and below ground, that answers to no one, but the group's nonviolent extremism points to a wider problem of exclusionary, sectarian, extremism that its public *dakwah* campaigns have contributed to. Hateful extremism—nonviolent extremism that incites hate and demonises minorities—has been a growing force in Indonesia for decades and is a more immediate problem than violent extremism for most Indonesians. It manifests in groups such as the vigilante militia Islamic Defenders Front (FPI—Front Pembela Islam). Since its formation in August 1998, in the turbulent wake of Suharto's sudden resignation in

May, FPI has grown to a network of several hundred thousand activists across Java. Working with hateful extremist groups has proven irresistible for some political actors, most notably retired general Prabowo Subianto¹³. Prabowo's camp actively supported the '212 movement' campaigns against the Chinese Christian governor of Jakarta, 'Ahok' (Basuki Tjahaja Purnama) in 2016 and 2017, led by FPI and building on a virulently sectarian campaign against rival presidential candidate Joko Widodo (Jokowi) in 2014 that was partially reprised in the lead-up to simultaneous parliamentary and presidential polls on 17 April 2019¹⁴.

Fearing, apparently for good reason, that violent extremists would seize the opportunity to attack around the time of the 22 May official announcement of the poll results, Detachment 88 moved to arrest 31 suspected terrorists belonging to five networks affiliated with IS. The unit seized 11 fully-assembled IEDs containing TATP, IS's explosive of choice.¹⁵

Despite those arrests, energetic riots on 21 and 22 May in Central and West Jakarta followed Prabowo's emphatic rejection of the poll results (despite losing to Jokowi by a wide margin of 44.5% to 55.5%). FPI activists were involved in the riots but the network did not appear to be in control of what happened¹⁶. Eight people were killed and more than 700 injured in the worst political violence in Indonesia since the fall of the Suharto regime in May 1998. One man was reported to have died in hospital of a gunshot wound but the cause of death of the other seven was not revealed. Security Minister Wiranto declared that 'paid thugs' had instigated the violence—claims backed up by police chief Tito Karnavian in their joint press conference. Envelopes of cash were reportedly seized from some rioters, along with weapons such two pistols and an M4 carbine semi-automatic rifle. As he showed the military issue M4 to journalists Tito explained: "This gun comes with a silencer so if you shoot at the masses, no one will hear. Based on our intelligence, the targets were government and military officials as well as protesters, and the aim was to create martyrs".¹⁷ He said that he had ordered his men to use only rubber bullets rather than live rounds when they confronted rioters, in order to avoid police being blamed for any deaths or injuries resulting from gunshot wounds. Tito was praised for his measured handling of the rioting, which was contained to two days.

Even more remarkably, police claimed that former army general Kivlan Zen, a key ally of Prabowo, and early patron of FPI, had attempted to orchestrate the assassination of Jokowi's key security officials, including fellow former generals Security Minister Wiranto, Maritime Minister Luhut Pandjaitan, National Intelligence Agency chief Budi Gunawan and Presidential Intelligence Adviser, and former police general, Gories Mere. Kivlan, who had been arrested on charges of illegal possession of weapons, denies any knowledge of the alleged plot, and the affair remains shrouded in mystery.¹⁸

In a surprising move, Prabowo was appointed Minister of Defence when Jokowi's new cabinet was announced in late October. Not only does the inclusion of his rival in the cabinet consolidate Jokowi's coalition in parliament, but it also reduces the risk of political actors aligned with Prabowo succumbing to the temptation to employ hateful, and possibly violent, extremism to sabotage the government.

Tito Karnavian was made Minister for Home Affairs, taking him out of the chain of control of policing, but not before he had vastly increased the size of Detachment 88 and expanded its operations to every province. As minister, he's now responsible for the strategically important work of drafting and implementing new security legislation. His former deputy in Detachment 88 and the head of the police Criminal Investigation Agency, General Idham Aziz, replaces him as Chief of Police.¹⁹

In the same month that those announcements were made, Detachment 88 arrested a further 40 suspected terrorists planning bombings involving at least four suicide bombers.²⁰ And, as mentioned above, a further 43 were arrested in November.²¹ As in most arrests in recent years, the suspects are alleged to be members of JAD.

Indonesian counterterrorism is now better resourced and led than ever before, and the important work of rehabilitation has finally commenced in earnest, but the threat remains resilient and shows no signs of abating.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia is but one-tenth the size of Indonesia and has so far suffered no significant international terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, it faces a level of threat from terrorist groups that's proportionally every bit as great as that facing Indonesia. Since 2013, Malaysian authorities led by the very experienced counterterrorism division within the Special Branch of the Royal Malaysian Police have foiled 26 planned terror attacks. This has led to the arrest of more than 460 terrorism suspects, of whom a surprisingly large portion, around 131, were foreigners from 21 countries, mostly from neighbouring Indonesia and the Philippines (47).²² By the end of July 2019, the number arrested had risen to 519.²³

Social surveys have consistently revealed that young Malays have become radicalised to a significantly greater degree than Indonesian youth. A recent survey found that 21% of Muslim university students felt that terrorism was 'an effective strategy to achieve an objective', and around half of those surveyed acknowledged

that it would be possible for them to develop violent radical ideas that might result in violent acts.²⁴

As in Indonesia, the main focus of concern in Malaysia lies with those inspired by IS, including the 102 or more Malaysians who travelled to Syria to join IS since 2013. It's thought that at least 40 have been killed in combat, including nine as suicide bombers. Despite concerns over the risk that might be posed by IS fighters and supporters returning from Syria, Malaysia remains determined to repatriate its citizens, to prosecute them and to seek to rehabilitate them where possible. So far, 11 Malaysians have been repatriated and are being processed. A further 39 detained in Syria, out of a total of at least 65, have reached out to the Malaysian Government and requested repatriation.

Authorities worry not just about those who have travelled to Syria and returned, but also about those who had aspired to join the caliphate and are now frustrated that they were left behind. Malaysia, even more than Indonesia, struggles with a febrile environment of sectarian sentiment, much of it openly propagated through religious lectures and training activities. In this context, the IS *takfiri* judgemental narrative of anti-Shia, anti-Christian and anti-mainstream Muslim sentiment remains an ever-present facilitator of radicalisation, even though so far the Special Branch has been able to prevent any successful attacks.

In May 2019, the Special Branch announced that it had foiled a wave of intended large-scale attacks and assassinations of prominent 'anti-Muslim' personalities by IS 'wolf packs' and planned for the first week of Ramadan. One Malaysian, two Rohingya and an Indonesian were arrested in greater Kuala Lumpur and in Terengganu on 5 and 7 May as police hunted three other men—two Malaysians and an Indonesian—suspected of planning attacks.²⁵

The thwarted attacks were seen as a worrying development in which IS played into local anxiety and sought to engineer sectarian violence while using foreign militants in Malaysia. Following the arrest of 16 suspects—12 Indonesians, three Malaysians and one Indian—counterterrorism chief Ayob Khan Pitchay observed in September that IS capitalises on the perception that 'Islam is under threat in Malaysia' and that the new government is 'not doing enough to protect Muslims'.²⁶

On 24 May, two men were arrested after making TATP IEDs and testing them near their homes. This brought to a total of 80 the number of suspected terrorists arrested in Malaysia in the previous 12 months.